

Message Text

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ORIGIN PRS-01

INFO OCT-01 SS-15 ISO-00 CCO-00 NSC-05 NSCE-00 SSO-00 /022 R

DRAFTED BY S/PRS:RANDERSON:AVW

APPROVED BY S/PRS:RANDERSON

S/S/ APSHANKLE

S - JCOVEY

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P 212343Z OCT 75 ZFF4

FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO USDEL SECRETARY PRIORITY

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SOPN, PFOR, US. VS, AEMR

SUBJECT: EXTRACTS FROM BRADSHER ARTICLES ON FALL OF SAIGON

FOR SECRETARY AND ASST SECRETARY HABIB FROM S/PRS -ANDERSON
NO. 17

FOLLOWING ARE KEY EXCERPTS FROM EXTENSIVE TWO-PART STORY BY
HENRY BRADSHER CARRIED IN OCTOBER 19 AND 20 ISSUES OF WASH
STAR.

"U.S. EMBASSY IN SAIGON CHOSE TO BELIEVE COMMUNIST ASSURANCES
THAT A TRUCE WOULD BE ARRANGED LAST APRIL, RATHER THAN ITS
OWN INTELLIGENCE REPORTS THAT NORTH VIETNAMESE INTENDED TO
CAPTURE CITY, ACCORDING TO OFFICIAL SOURCES.

"THIS ACCEPTANCE OF WHAT APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN A DELIBERATE
COMMUNIST DECEPTION WAS A MAJOR ELEMENT IN EMBASSY'S FAILURE
TO MAKE ADEQUATE PREPARATIONS FOR EVACUATION. THOUSANDS OF
VIETNAMESE WHO HAD BEEN PROMISED THAT THEY WOULD BE TAKEN
OUT, AS WELL AS DOZENS OF AMERICANS, WERE LEFT BEHIND.

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"ASSURANCES, WHICH SEEMED TO ORIGINATE IN HANOI, SAID THAT
U.S. WOULD BE GIVEN A CHANCE FOR AN ORDERLY WITHDRAWAL FROM
VIETNAM DURING A HALT IN FIGHTING.

"MESSAGE CAME THROUGH HUNGARIAN AND POLISH DELEGATIONS TO ICCS, WHICH WAS CREATED BY INEFFECTIVE 1973 VIETNAM CEASE-FIRE AGREEMENT. ATTEMPTS TO CONFIRM IT THROUGH SOVIET UNION YIELDED AMBIGUOUS ANSWERS THAT WERE TAKEN BY MANY OFFICIALS AS CONFIRMATION.

"OFFICIALS IN WASHINGTON MADE FINAL PREPARATIONS FOR A HELICOPTER EVACUATION OF SAIGON ON BASIS OF INTELLIGENCE REPORTS. BUT THEY ALSO GAVE SOME CREDENCE TO ASSURANCES, IF NOT SO MUCH AS AMBASSADOR GRAHAM A. MARTIN IN SAIGON DID.

"SECSTATE HAK SAID WHEN EVACUATION ENDED THAT UNTIL 24 HRS BEFORE IT STARTED, 'WE THOUGHT THERE WAS SOME CONSIDERABLE HOPE THAT NORTH VIETNAMESE WOULD NOT SEEK A SOLUTION BY PURELY MILITARY MEANS... WE THOUGHT A NEGOTIATED SOLUTION IN NEXT FEW DAYS WAS HIGHLY PROBABLE.'

"BUT THEN, 'THE NORTH VIETNAMESE OBVIOUSLY CHANGED SIGNALS' HAK SAID.

"INTELLIGENCE REPORTS SHOWED, HOWEVER, THAT THERE WAS NO CHANGE OF SIGNALS. COMMUNISTS NEVER INTENDED TO MAKE ANY KIND OF DEAL. THOSE REPORTS WERE SUBSTANTIATED BY INDEPENDENT MEANS MORE THAN A WEEK BEFORE FINAL ATTACK ON SAIGON AND HAVE SINCE BEEN VERIFIED BY COMMUNIST STATEMENTS.

....."ROLE OF HUNGARIANS AND POLES IS UNCLEAR. IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO LEARN WHETHER THEY WERE DECEIVED THEMSELVES BY VIETNAMESE COMMUNISTS INTO THINKING A DEAL MIGHT BE ARRANGED, OR WERE INFORMED PARTIES TO A PLAN TO THROW U.S. OFFICIALS OFF BALANCE BY PUTTING OUT A FALSE STORY.

"SOME AMERICANS WHO WERE INVOLVED IN HIGH LEVEL EXCHANGES DURING LAST FEW WEEKS OF APRIL BELIEVE THE TWO COMMUNIST DELEGATIONS WERE IN ON PLAN. THEY ALSO BELIEVE THAT SOVIET UNION WAS A PARTY TO DECEIT, ALTHOUGH SEVERAL SENIOR OFFICIALS REFUSE TO ACCEPT THIS.

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....."NORTH VIETNAM'S DEFENSE MINISTER, VO NGUYEN GIAP, AND ITS ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF, VAN TIEN DUNG, PUBLISHED AN ARTICLE JOINTLY IN FOUR MAIN HANOI PUBLICATIONS ON JUNE 30 RECOUNTING HOW FINAL VICTORY WAS ACHIEVED. THEY MADE IT CLEAR THAT COMMUNISTS HAD NEVER HAD ANY INTENTION OF MAKING A DEAL.

'- BY LATE MARCH, WHEN HUE BATTLE WAS GOING TO END IN VICTORY, WE HAD ALREADY OFFICIALLY TAKEN DECISION TO LAUNCH A HISTORIC CAMPAIGN OF DECISIVE SIGNIFICANCE...BEARING THE NAME OF GREAT PRESIDENT HO CHI MINH.'

" WITHIN TWO WEEKS OF COMMUNIST DECISION, WORD ON IT HAD FILTERED THROUGH TO CIA'S OFFICES ON SIXTH FLOOR OF U.S. EMBASSY IN SAIGON.

"INFORMATION CAME FROM WHAT AMERICANS CALLED THE COMMUNISTS' CENTRAL OFFICE FOR SOUTH VIETNAM, OR COSVN. THIS WAS ELUSIVELY MOBILE MILITARY AND POLITICAL HEADQUARTERS FOR WAR IN SOUTHERN PART OF SOUTH VIETNAM WHICH U.S. TROOPS HAD TRIED UNSUCCESSFULLY TO CAPTURE IN MAY 1970 INVASION OF CAMBODIA.

"COSVN WAS DIRECTED BY PHAM HUNG, A MEMBER OF POLITBURO OF LAO DONG PARTY--COMMUNIST ORGANIZATION BASED IN HANOI THAT RULES VIETNAM--WHO OUTRANKED EVEN GENERAL GIAP. SINCE FALL OF SAIGON, PHAM HUNG HAS EMERGED AS MAN IN CHARGE OF SOUTH VIETNAM, TAKING PRECEDENCE IN OFFICIAL LISTS OVER THO AND LEADERS OF APPARENTLY POWERLESS PROVISIONAL REVOLUTIONARY GOVT (PRG).

"CONTRARY TO RECENT CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY ABOUT A LACK OF AMERICAN INTELLIGENCE AGENTS INSIDE VIET CONG APPARATUS, CIA RECEIVED OCCASIONAL REPORTS FROM WITHIN COSVN. OVER YEARS, THESE REPORTS HAD REPEATEDLY BEEN PROVEN ACCURATE.

"FIRST REPORT ON LATE-MARCH DECISION TO SMASH OVER SAIGON WAS BRIEF. COMING AT A TIME OF RAPID DEVELOPMENTS AND NUMEROUS INTELLIGENCE REPORTS OF VARYING DEGREES OF RELIABILITY, IT SEEMS NOT TO HAVE GOTTEN MUCH ATTENTION IN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
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EITHER THE SAIGON EMBASSY OR IN WASHINGTON.

"A FACTOR CONTRIBUTING TO THIS NEGLECT WAS MESSAGE WHICH HUNGARIANS AND POLES WERE BEGINNING TO WHISPER IN AMERICAN EARS.

..."STATE DEPARTMENT SENT A CABLE TO AMBASSADOR MARTIN WHICH SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN TRIGGERED BY INTELLIGENCE, ALTHOUGH THIS CONNECTION CANNOT BE CONFIRMED. IT ASKED HIM ABOUT EVACUATION PLANS.

..."MARTIN'S ANSWER TO STATE DEPT'S QUERY WAS THAT HE HAD NO PLAN TO EVACUATE LOCAL VIETNAMESE EMPLOYEES BECAUSE THERE WERE TOO MANY OF THEM AND BESIDES AN EVACUATION WOULD INDUCE PANIC IN SAIGON, POSSIBLY CAUSING THIEU TO FALL. AT SAME TIME, MARTIN'S DEPUTY, W. J. LEHMANN, WAS TELLING EMBASSY DIVISION HEADS AT STAFF MEETINGS THAT PLANS WERE BEING MADE TO TAKE CARE OF THEIR HIGH RISK EMPLOYEES, FOR WHOM MANY OF OTHER DIPLOMATS FELT GREAT PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY.

"KISSINGER CABLED BACK AFTER GETTING MARTIN'S ANSWER, SAYING IT WAS INADEQUATE. UNDER PRESSURE FROM SFRC AND OTHER CONGRESSIONAL UNITS, SECSTATE ASKED MARTIN TO SPEED UP REDUCTION OF AIRPLANE EVACUATIONS SO NUMBER OF PERSONS WHO MIGHT NEED TO BE LIFTED OUT BY HELICOPTER WOULD BE MANAGEABLE.

"BUT MARTIN FELT NO GREAT URGENCY. ON BASIS OF HUNGARIAN AND POLISH MESSAGE, HE DID NOT THINK A HELICOPTER LIFT WOULD BE NECESSARY.

"EVALUATION IN WASHINGTON WAS COMPLEX. EVERY MORNING A NUMBER OF GROUPS MET AROUND TOWN TO REVIEW LATEST DEVELOPMENTS AND LATE EVERY AFTERNOON A MEETING WAS CONVENED AT STATE DEPARTMENT. CHAIRED BY P. C. HABIB, ASST. SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EAST ASIAN & PACIFIC AFFAIRS, IT WAS ATTENDED MOST OF TIME BY KISSINGER'S NO. 2 MAN, DEPUTY SECRETARY R. S. INGERSOLL.

"REPRESENTATIVES OF STATE, NSC, PENTAGON, CIA AND OTHER
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BRANCHES OF GOVT MET WITH HABIB TO TRY TO MAKE PLANS. BUT THEY WERE ALMOST OVERWHELMED BY MASS OF SOMETIMES CONFLICTING AND OFTEN CONFUSING REPORTS, ACCORDING TO ONE PARTICIPANT IN MEETINGS.

"COMMENTING ON APRIL 17 REPORT FROM COSVN, THIS SOURCE SAID THAT CIA USUALLY FAILED TO INDICATE CLEARLY WHICH REPORTS OUT OF A MASS OF INTELLIGENCE DESERVED MORE CREDENCE THAN OTHERS. A DESIRE TO PROTECT CIA AGENTS OBSCURED FACT THAT THIS PARTICULAR REPORT CAME DIRECTLY FROM COSVN, SOURCE ADDED.

"APPARENTLY REFLECTING INTELLIGENCE, FORD SAID IN AN INTERVIEW APRIL 21 THAT HE HAD IMPRESSION IN PREVIOUS FEW DAYS THAT HANOI WAS SEEKING A QUICK MILITARY TAKEOVER, BUT THERE WAS 'NO WAY TO TELL WHAT NORTH VIETNAMESE WILL DO.' HE NOTED THAT A LULL IN FIGHTING HAD SET IN AROUND SAIGON EARLIER THAT DAY.

"THIS TURNED OUT TO BE A FIVE-DAY LULL, BEGINNING AS MARTIN POLGAR AND THE FRENCH AMBASSADOR, MERILLON, FINALLY CONVINCED THIEU THAT HE SHOULD RESIGN FOR GOOD OF SOUTH VIETNAM. LULL SEEMED TO SUBSTANTIATE HUNGARIAN AND POLISH MESSAGE OF AN EVACUATION TRUCE, BUT EVACUATION WENT AHEAD ONLY FAIRLY SLOWLY WHILE HIGH-RISK VIETNAMESE REMAINED IN THEIR JOBS.

"OFFICIALS HERE DECIDED THAT, BECAUSE OF CONFLICT BETWEEN INTELLIGENCE AND DIPLOMATIC REPORTS, POSSIBILITY OF AN

ARRANGED END NEEDED TO BE CHECKED WITH NORTH VIETNAM.
SOVIET UNION WAS ASKED TO INQUIRE IN HANOI."

"MOSCOW A PARTY TO DECEIT ON LAST SAYS OF SAIGON?"
(SECOND OF TWO ARTICLES).

..."NEGOTIATING POSSIBILITY WAS CLOSELY HELD IN WASHINGTON
BY PRESIDENT FORD AND A HANDFUL OF OFFICIALS AROUND HAK.
SECSTATE WAS, AS USUAL, PLAYING AN ALMOST LONE HAND IN
TIGHTEST SECRECY IN APPARENT HOPE OF PULLING OFF A DIPLO-
MATIC MIRACLE OUT OF A HOPELESS LOOKING SITUATION.

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"HE DECIDED TO ASK SOVIET UNION -- IN SPIRIT OF DETENTE --
TO SEE IF IT COULD LEARN FROM HANOI WHAT VIETNAMESE COM-
MUNIST INTENTIONS WERE. THIS MIGHT RESOLVE CONFLICT IN
AVAILABLE INFORMATION.

"ACCORDING TO SEVERAL SENIOR OFFICIALS, SOVIET REPLY WAS
AMBIGUOUS.

"ASKED IF IT WERE TRUE THAT A TRUCE AND ORDERLY EVACUATION
WERE POSSIBLE, MOSCOW CAME BACK -- OSTENSIBLY AFTER CON-
TACTING HANOI -- WITH A REPLY TO EFFECT THAT U.S. COULD
PROCEED ON THAT ASSUMPTION. ONE OFFICIAL CALLED IT
'AMBIGUOUS,' AND ANOTHER SAID IT WAS 'VAGUE AND UNCERTAIN.'

..."SOME LOWER OFFICIALS FEEL THAT MOSCOW WAS A PARTY TO
DECEIT OF GETTING U.S. TO BELIEVE IT COULD GET OUT OF
VIETNAM SMOOTHLY AND RESPECTABLY. BUT OTHER OFFICIALS
REFUSE TO ACCEPT THIS, SUGGESTING THAT SOVIETS WERE KEPT
IN DARK BY VIETNAMESE COMMUNIST LEADERSHIP AND PUT OFF
WITH A DELIBERATELY UNIFORMATIVE ANSWER WHEN THEY TRIED TO
ACT AS INTERMEDIARIES FOR WASHINGTON.

..."SECSTATE ADDED THAT UNTIL SUNDAY NIGHT, APRIL 27,
WASHINGTON TIME, WHICH WAS MONDAY MORNING, APRIL 28, IN
SAIGON, 'WE THOUGHT THERE WAS SOME CONSIDERABLE HOPE THAT
NORTH VIETNAMESE WOULD NOT SEEK A SOLUTION BY PURELY
MILITARY MEANS...' DUONG VAN MINH HAD THEN BECOME PRESI-
DENT AND 'WE THOUGHT A NEGOTIATED SOLUTION IN NEXT FEW
DAYS WAS HIGHLY PROBABLE.

"SOMETIME SUNDAY NIGHT NORTH VIETNAMESE OBVIOUSLY CHANGED
SIGNALS. WHY THAT IS, WE DO NOT YET KNOW... WHAT PRODUCED
THIS SUDDEN SHIFT TO A MILITARY OPTION OR WHAT WOULD SEEM
TO US TO BE A SUDDEN SHIFT TO A MILITARY OPTION, I HAVE NOT
HAD SUFFICIENT OPPORTUNITY TO ANALYZE.'

"UNTIL SUNDAY, HAK SAID, 'THE BATTLEFIELD SITUATIONSUGGESTED

THAT THERE WAS A STANDDOWN OF SIGNIFICANT MILITARY ACTIVITY
AND PUBLIC PRONOUNCEMENTS WERE SUBSTANTIALLY IN DIRECTION
THAT A NEGOTIATION WOULD START WITH GENERAL MINH. THERE
WERE ALSO OTHER REASONS WHICH LED US TO BELIEVE THAT POSSI-
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BILITY OF A NEGOTIATION REMAINED OPEN.'

"THERE WERE OTHER ELEMENTS CONTRIBUTING TO HOPES FOR A
TRUCE -- OR CREATION OF A DECEPTION.

"A PRESS REPORT FROM MOSCOW APRIL 18 SAID SOVIETS IN CON-
TACT WITH NORTH VIETNAMESE AND VIET CONG DID NOT EXPECT
THEM TO TRY TO ACHIEVE ALL-OUT VICTORY BY CONQUEST. AND
ON APRIL 19 PRG'S REPRESENTATIVE STATIONED AT TAN SON NHUT
AIRBASE ON OUTSKIRTS OF SAIGON UNDER PARIS AGREEMENT
ARRANGEMENTS, COL. VO DONG GIANG, HINTED AT A PEACEFUL
ARRANGEMENT RATHER THAN AN ATTACK.

"ALL OF THESE REINFORCED HUNGARIAN-POLISH MESSAGE, CREATING
A CONVICTION BY MARTIN AND SOME OTHERS IN SAIGON EMBASSY
THAT A DEAL WAS BEING STRUCK. APPARENTLY AFTER SOME
FURTHER DETAIL FROM ICCS COMMUNISTS, AND WITH RECEIPT OF
A SOVIET REPLY, THE WORD WENT AROUND IN TOP EMBASSY CIRCLES
THAT 'THE FIX IS IN'.

"ON THURSDAY, APRIL 24, MARTIN'S DEPUTY AMBASSADOR, W. J.
LEHMANN, TELEPHONED HIS WIFE ODETTE IN BANGKOK, WHERE
SHE HAD BEEN EVACUATED WITH OTHER EMBASSY DEPENDENTS.
LEHMANN TOLD HER TO COME BACK AND BRING A LONG LIST OF
PERSONAL SUPPLIES, BECAUSE A DEAL HAD BEEN MADE AND THEY
WOULD BE IN SAIGON FOR SOME TIME TO COME.

"THIS WAS AT A TIME WHEN, WHITE HOUSE SAID, FORD HAD
ORDERED AMERICAN PERSONNEL REDUCED 'TO LEVELS THAT COULD
BE QUICKLY EVACUATED DURING AN EMERGENCY.' MARTIN'S
EMBASSY WAS OPERATING ON ITS OWN INTERPRETATIONS, WITH
WHAT LOOKED IN RETROSPECT LIKE WISHFUL THINKING STRONGLY
AFFECTING ANALYSIS OF SITUATION.

...."HAK'S BELIEF THAT SITUATION CHANGED ON MONDAY MORNING
SAIGON TIME SHOWED A LAG IN AMERICAN PERCEPTIONS.

..."BIG AMERICAN-BUILT MILITARY LOGISTICAL COMPLEX AT BIEN
HOA, 15 MILES NORTHEAST OF SAIGON, WAS ALSO UNDER ATTACK.
ON SUNDAY A TEAM LED BY ERICH F. VON MARBOD, A PRINCIPAL
DEPUTY ASST SECRETARY OF DEFENSE IN CHARGE OF MILITARY
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AID TO INDOCHINA, RECOVERED SOME VALUABLE AID EQUIPMENT FROM BIEN HOA WHILE UNDER ARTILLERY FIRE.

..."AFTER BEING SHOT OUT OF BIEN HOA ON SUNDAY. VON MARBOD WENT TO SEE MARTIN ON MONDAY MORNING. MARTIN ADVISED HIM THAT IT WAS UNNECESSARY TO TAKE CHANCES BECAUSE THERE WOULD SHORTLY BE A HALT IN FIGHTING DURING WHICH SUPPLIES AS WELL AS PERSONNEL COULD BE EVACUATED BY ARRANGEMENT WITH COMMUNISTS.

..."AFTER DAWN HE WENT OUT TO SEE FOR HIMSELF WHERE SHELLS HAD LANDED, KILLING TWO U.S. MARINE GUARDS AND OTHERS. BACK AT HIS EMBASSY, MARTIN TOLD STAFFERS THAT HE COULD NOT UNDERSTAND IT. HE STILL REFUSED TO BELIEVE THAT COMMUNISTS WOULD PERSIST IN MILITARY TAKEOVER, BUT INSTEAD THOUGHT THERE COULD OR WOULD BE A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT.

"WASHINGTON NEVER SEEMED TO UNDERSTAND, MUCH LESS ACCEPT, DEGREE OF CERTAINTY WHICH HAD GRIPPED MARTIN AND SOME OTHERS IN HIS EMBASSY. BARRAGE AT TAN SON NHUT LED TO FORD' ORDERING FINAL HELICOPTER EVACUATION. MARTIN STRUNG IT OUT AS LONG AS POSSIBLE, GETTING MAXIMUM POSSIBLE NUMBER OF VIETNAMESE REMOVED AT LAST MINUTE AFTER HAVING FAILED TO PROVIDE FOR THEM EARLIER.

..."IT WAS NOT JUST CONGRESS WHICH WAS EXASPERATED WITH HIM DURING DELAY IN REDUCING EMBASSY STAFF TO EASILY EVACUATED LIMITS. PERSONS WHO ATTENDED CRISIS MEETINGS CHAIRED BY HABIB REPORTED VERY CRITICAL COMMENTS ABOUT MARTIN BY HABIB AND OTHERS, AT LEAST IN PART REFLECTING DISTRESS OF EMBASSY PERSONNEL IN SAIGON ABOUT LAG IN ARRANGING FOR SAFETY OF VIETNAMESE FOR WHOM THEY FELT RESPONSIBLE.

"BUT DEGREE TO WHICH MARTIN WAS BEING LED ASTRAY BY HUNGARIANS AND POLES AS WELL AS HIS OWN WISHFUL THINKING WAS NEVER PROPERLY APPRECIATED HERE. WHILE HAK AND OTHERS ALLOWED THEIR HOPES FOR A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT TO RISE ABOUT APRIL 21, OFFICIALS HERE KEPT IN SIGHT NEED TO PREPARE FOR A FINAL COLLAPSE. MARTIN APPARENTLY DID NOT.

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..."TWO CONGRESSIONAL SUBCOMMITTEES HAVE SUBMITTED LETTERS TO STATE DEPARTMENT ASKING THAT MARTIN TESTIFY ABOUT THOSE LAST DAYS. THEY ARE LEGISLATION AND NATIONAL SECURITY SUBCOMMITTEE OF HOUSE GOVT OPERATIONS COMMITTEE AND HOUSE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE'S SPECIAL SUBCOMMITTEE ON INVESTIGATIONS.

"MARTIN HAD BEEN IN U.S. FOR MEDICAL TREATMENT LATE LAST
WINTER AND HAS BEEN SICK AGAIN SINCE HE WAS TAKEN BY
HELICOPTER OFF HIS EMBASSY'S ROOF. SUBCOMMITTEES HAVE BEEN
TOLD ORALLY THAT HE COULD NOT APPEAR BECAUSE OF ILLNESS.
"HE WAS DISCHARGED FROM A HOSPITAL ALMOST TWO WEEKS AGO
AND NOW, WHILE ON LEAVE, IS HAUNTING STATE DEPARTMENT
ASKING WHEN HE WILL BE GIVEN A NEW AMBASSADORIAL POSTING.

"WHITE HOUSE HAS NOT DECIDED WHAT TO DO WITH HIM. S
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 26 AUG 1999
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: TOSEC, PRESS COMMENTS, GOVERNMENT OVERTHROW, EMERGENCY EVACUATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 21 OCT 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: CunninFX
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975STATE250588
Document Source: ADS
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: S/PRS:RANDERSON:AVW
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: n/a
Film Number: D750365-0816
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t197510102/baaaacwz.tel
Line Count: 386
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, TEXT ON MICROFILM
Office: ORIGIN PRS
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 8
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: CunninFX
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 28 MAY 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <28 MAY 2003 by ShawDG>; APPROVED <06 OCT 2003 by CunninFX>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: n/a
TAGS: SOPN, PFOR, AEMR, PINS, US, VS, WASHINGTON STAR, (BRADSHER, HENRY)
To: SECRETARY
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006